

# NEWS from

## The Savannah River Site

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For immediate release

### SRS BEGINS NEW ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP JOB

AIKEN, S.C. (Jan. 25)—SRS recently began another step in the effort to clean up the legacy of the Cold War—the final closure of the Old Solvent Tanks.

Located in the Old Radioactive Waste Burial Ground (ORWBG), these 22 underground steel tanks were used to temporarily store degraded liquids from the plutonium-uranium extraction process. They range in size from 6,800 to 27,000 gallons in capacity and were used until the mid-1970s. The ORWBG, which has been inactive for nearly 30 years, was the original burial site for low-level radioactive waste.

The tanks are nearly empty having only small amounts of liquid and sludge that could not be removed. Crews are now completely filling the tanks with grout (concrete-like material) to prevent them from collapsing. Grouting the tanks will also trap and hold the residual materials so that they do not spread to the environment. The tank area will then be covered with a protective cap along with the rest of ORWBG.

Remotely operated camera systems allow work crews to inspect the tanks visually and make sure that they are being grouted completely and properly.

“It’s gratifying to move another step forward in cleaning up SRS in a way that is safe for workers, meets regulatory requirements, and gets the job done cost-effectively,” said Mike Sabbe, vice president and general manager of Environmental Restoration. “So far we’re ahead of schedule on these tanks, which makes the news even better and reflects well on the talented team which planned, designed, and is executing this remediation project.”

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The tank remediation project is the latest in a series of milestones that track the history of the Burial Ground Complex, of which the Old Radioactive Waste Burial Ground (ORWBG) is a part.

The ORWBG, which occupies 76 acres, received radioactive waste between 1952 and 1974. In 1998, a soil cover at least two feet thick was put over the ORWBG to reduce ground-level radiation levels, to reduce the amount of rainwater flowing through the buried waste, and to reduce the spread of contamination to the ground water.

Final closure is currently being planned under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act as agreed in the Savannah River Site Federal Facility Agreement (FFA). The FFA identifies the ORWBG as having the greatest environmental and human health threat among all other waste units, according to Rod Rimando, the DOE manager responsible for closing the ORWBG and tanks. "Grouting the tanks marks the last significant step in finally closing the most radioactively contaminated area of the site," he said.

"In September 1998, I held a public meeting on this subject in downtown Aiken. Since then, the public and, in particular, the SRS Citizens Advisory Board have been an integral part of the decision-making process. They support grouting the tanks in place and, once and for all, closing the burial site," said Mr. Rimando.

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